Beyond Neuromantics and Mirrorshades:

Cyberpunk and Its Global Implications

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Abstract

This independent research seeks to analyze the socio-political elements surrounding the formation and aspects of cyberpunk, drawing parallels between the twentieth-century fiction and the twenty-first-century reality. Cyberpunk refers to the science fiction subgenre encompassing a high tech, low life world which fuses advanced technologies with a dark, broken near-future dystopia. The genre initially sought to move beyond the utopian, idealistic science fiction of the early to the mid-twentieth century into a more realistic depiction of what technological developments and socio-political realities of the time would lead to in the near future. The three sections of this research allow for an in-depth analysis of what brought forth the creation of the genre, what defines its works and texts, and how the genre's commentaries apply to society and culture at large. First, a foundational analysis exploring the influencing factors on the early visionaries of the genre will contextualize the origins of this ideology. Then, the exploration of two seminal texts of cyberpunk, Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner* and

Mamoru Oshii's 1995 *Ghost in the Shell*, through a close textual reading will illuminate commentary from their creators on their perceptions of the world at that time and in a possible future. Lastly, the application of distillations from the second section of this research will draw parallels to twenty-first-century society and culture, including topics such as the globalization of digital media, mass-market availability of products, the widespread usage of social media, and the role of cyberspace in every facet of official and private life. Manifestations of the cyberpunk vision have not only occurred but exist to the point where one could consider the early works of the genre as prophetic for the world of today. Through analysis and observation of elements that derive from cyberpunk, individuals can appreciate the influence of the genre on even the smallest aspects of daily life and what lies in the world of tomorrow.

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Introduction

Beyond Neuromantics and Mirrorshades

"*The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.*"

- William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, p. 3

The opening line of William Gibson's 1984 *Neuromancer* illustrates a world of black and white, with the skies themselves lacking any vibrancy of color. Taken as a literal descriptor of Chiba City's skyline or for the general atmosphere that saturates those residing in it, these opening words serve as the figurative "switching on of the television" before the image of *Neuromancer*'s world presents itself. Gibson's analogous use of television to describe the color of the sky falls into the trope of the ever-present place of technology in the worlds of cyberpunk. The following pages of *Neuromancer* further this aesthetic established with the opening line, creating a world of urban decay with high tech permeating the very skin of the residents of Chiba City, Japan. Being among the first works in the cyberpunk movement, *Neuromancer* leads by example in setting the tone of what would follow in a short time. I intend to discuss the origins of the genre proper in the following chapter, but cyberpunk formed in a period of flux across the board in 1980s culture: in politics, art, social practices, technology usage, and more.

One fundamental influence at the core of the genre's formation centered around the direction of science fiction before the 1980s. The 'Golden Age' of the 1940s and 1950s pulp

science fiction centered around the role of technology as not only bettering all problems but elevating humanity into a utopian existence. The New Wave science fiction writers of the 1960s and 1970s shifted their science fiction away from this style and provided critiques on their predecessor's works. Writers of the New Wave explored the impacts of social and technological revolutions in their contemporary period, including the darker realities of what these changes brought into society. Cyberpunk's roots took hold in the shift of direction from pulp utopian fiction to a more 'realistic' reflection of the world. Early inklings of the genre appeared in the works of the New Wave, such as Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Dick's book would influence the genre's first film in 1982 with Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. From these roots, the early cyberpunk writers developed their early explorations that established what the genre entailed for those that followed their precedent.

Born of the 80s milieu, "the Movement" began with exchanges and collaborations between the genre's founders, consisting of William Gibson, Rudy Rucker, Lewis Shiner, John Shirley, and Bruce Sterling. Though the movement went by many labels, including Radical Hard Science Fiction, the Outlaw Technologists, the Eighties Wave, the Neuromantics, and the Mirrorshades Group, Cyberpunk survived as the label for the movement.[1] From this group, more writers began to depict the high tech, low life worlds present across the collective literature. Cyberpunk fused the feelings of 80s pop culture and counterculture with a pervasive growth in personal technology and the elements of globalization that brought down previous barriers of separation. As Bruce Sterling identified in the Preface of *Mirrorshades: The*

[1] Bruce Sterling, "Preface," in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. Bruce Sterling (New York: Ace Books, 1988), ix.

Cyberpunk Anthology, "Certain central themes spring up repeatedly in cyberpunk. The theme of body invasion: prosthetic limbs, implanted circuitry, cosmetic surgery, genetic alteration. The even more powerful theme of mind invasion: brain-computer interfaces, artificial intelligence, neurochemistry – techniques radically redefining the nature of humanity, the nature of self."[2] This focus on the nature of humanity and the self serves as a central tenet of the larger inquires that cyberpunk exposed in its broader genre-based dialogue.

Cyberpunk explores the relationship between the human and selfhood with the place of technology (and all it entails) when ingrained in the very fabric of daily life. Who are we when we no longer are contained to the corporeal? What happens when the barrier between man and machine dissolves? What defines the extents of the human in comparison to an artificial mirror no different than the original? Does the definition of humans evolve when the modifications and changes to the self extend beyond current understandings? These questions no longer are bound strictly to the worlds of cyberpunk and science fiction, but, as I intend to explore through this research, now reflect the world of the twenty-first century. No longer limited to distant fiction worlds are the multinational megacorporations, ever-present digital marketing, social media, the expanse of cyberspace in the form of the Internet, and the rise of technology at large in every facet of human existence. Characteristics of the dystopic aftermath present in cyberpunk appear today, but we do not reside in a one-to-one replication of cyberpunk worlds. This research explores two seminal cyberpunk works from the 1980s and 1990s, which allows for extrapolation of the commentaries present in the text and subtext of these works to use as a lens of analysis for current society.

[2] Bruce Sterling, "Preface," in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. Bruce Sterling (New York: Ace Books, 1988), xiii.

The first chapter, “Before Cyberpunk: Social, Political, and Technological Influences,” serves as the contextual foundation to begin to understand the almost innumerable influences that played a part in the formation of the cyberpunk genre. I define the genre and encapsulate the central tropes and ideas ever-present across various mediums in the texts, from film to novel to graphic novel. In addition to defining the genre, presenting the general direction present in science fiction from the Golden Age through the New Wave further contextualizes what allowed for cyberpunk to emerge as a movement in the broader genre of science fiction. From this visual and literary basis, a separate look at the social, political, and technological influences present through the 1970s and 1980s adds additional understanding to the nature of the world that surrounded the writers present in the movement’s early days. The punk movement, rise in home computing, political conservatism from the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the United States and the United Kingdom, respectively, and more illustrate the varied nuances present across every facet of daily life and their connections to cyberpunk. From here, I conclude with a general breakdown of cyberpunk in the 1980s and 1990s, including the significant writers, literary works, and films to come during this couple decade span.

The second chapter, “Tears in Rain: Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner*,” begins the analysis of cyberpunk texts with the film that marked the transition from the proto cyberpunk to cyberpunk proper in the first few years of the 1980s. I briefly address the background surrounding the work, including director Ridley Scott’s role in adapting the novel, similarities and differences from Phillip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream Of Electric Sheep?*, and other information relevant for contextual understanding. I then provide a summary of *Blade Runner*’s narrative before transitioning to the analysis of two sequences. The first sequence

centers on Deckard being collected by Officer Gaff at the Street Vendor (7:25-9:35), and I analyze this scene as the basis of an exploration into the character of Deckard, as well as take a moment to discuss the architectural landscape captured in this scene. The second sequence is Roy Batty's final moments (1:45:15-1:47:50), and I explore the position of the replicant through a case study look into the character of Roy Batty. As I conclude the chapter, I state the significance of the findings from the scenes in the broader discussion present in the genre in a concluding section.

The third chapter, "Human Beyond Human: Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*," concludes the analysis of cyberpunk texts with one of Japan's signature cyberpunk works, Oshii's 1995 animated film based off of Masamune Shirow's original manga. I briefly address the background surrounding the work, including the several variations born from Shirow's original text, the narrative components found across the different entries into the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise, and other information relevant for contextual understanding. Afterward, I comment on the film's major points, as well as the place of *Ghost in the Shell* in the genre at large. I then provide a summary of *Ghost in the Shell*'s narrative before transitioning to the analysis of two sequences. The first sequence, indeed a series of connected sequences, is Major Kusanagi's dive off of the building in the opening, the opening credits, and a later scene when she is scuba diving in the bay (2:09-2:30; 3:50-4:06; 4:06-8:20; 27:50-29:00). This lengthy amalgamation of different scenes and parts of the film come together in my analysis of Kusanagi's posthuman body and the potential meanings surrounding the choice of shots and sequences. The second sequence consists of Kusanagi speaking with Batou about their posthuman identities through artificial corporeality and the aspects of personality that defines being human (29:00-33:02). I discuss further the idea of the posthuman presented, and the

philosophical and social points brought up through the character's dialogue. As I conclude the chapter, I state the significance of the findings from the scenes in the broader discussion present in the genre.

Finally, the conclusion of this research, "A 'Boring Dystopia,'" ties together findings from the texts and transition the analysis conducted into an application of these findings to everyday life in the twenty-first century. Tropes, characterizations, science fiction technology, philosophies, and more can extend to the world at large, and I connect some of these to illustrate the unnoticed permeation of cyberpunk fiction into contemporary reality. I close out this research by pointing out limitations and potential further research topics that I intend to pursue in the future.

I believe that cyberpunk no longer exists solely in the form of science fiction, whether that be film, novel, graphic novel, anime, manga, tabletop game, or video game. Cyberpunk, at its core, discusses a world where digital technology engrains itself in the very essence of humanity, either physically, virtually, or both. With the rise of invasive marketing tactics, complete takeovers from megacorporations, the inseparability of individuals from their technology, and more, it may be advantageous to explore the science fiction depiction of a world not dissimilar from our reality to glean where humanity is heading and the courses of action that one can take to reside in this world. Understanding the cyberpunk sandboxes from the last several decades will allow for a possible means in which to understand the complex web of today's world. This task is the main objective for this research, with everything else serving to further the discussion.

Chapter One

Before Cyberpunk: Social, Political, and Technological Influences

> "Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts…A graphical representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding…"

- A voice-over from a "kid's show" in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, p. 51

This short section, while narratively treated as if seemingly inconsequential, develops the idea of cyberspace in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*. Gibson's depiction here from the third chapter, much in the vein of early cyberpunk work, imagined virtual architecture and constructs that users would interact with as if it were reality. If the first word, cyberspace, were changed to the worldwide web or internet, nothing else of this section would become invalidated, particularly in the twenty-first century. Gibson's depiction, though not what manifested, appears recognizable in some part to the real developments that occurred within the decades that came after its release. It is in this dual-purpose connection between worldbuilding in cyberpunk and relating to the new developments in reality surrounding these creative pioneers

that I would like to start my contextual exploration of cyberpunk and how best to understand it, in terms of being a genre and movement.

Cyberpunk exists beyond being just a genre or a social movement, but rather it is both of these things and more, ever-changing as a reflection of the current world. As stated in the introduction, cyberpunk depicts science fiction worlds that fit the description of "high tech, low life." These worlds contain technology ranging from flying cars and artificial intelligence to personal cyberspace-connected devices (usually engrained into the skin or mind) and elaborate cyberspace constructions. In direct contrast to this exciting height for technology is the low levels of living conditions that the residents of these worlds reside in, including overpopulated urban areas built hundreds of floors into the sky, widespread poverty, substance addiction, rampant organized and unorganized crime, and a complete breakdown in governmental and law enforcement social structures that prioritize based off monetary incentive. Beyond the "high tech, low life" nature of cyberpunk is the two words that create the genre's title: cyber and punk. Cyber focuses on the role of technology concerning cyberspace, cybernetics, and everything in between the two. The focus on the cyber and human stories naturally leads to discussions of humanism, transhumanism, and posthumanism. Punk comes from adoption and identification with the punk movement's social resistance to government and norms, as well as the punk aesthetic as a form of protest against the polished, overly manufactured, overly homogenized fashion and media found in the 1970s. These essential components establish the foundation of cyberpunk as a genre, but a few more components round out the fundamentals shared through works of the genre.

Cyberpunk relies on the perversion and reversal of familiar tropes and ideas in speculative fiction to cement its darker world in the light necessary for the commentary and

discussions of the works. Cyberspace, in many of the genre's early works, imagined users directly interfacing with a digital world that an avatar had to travel within to reach locations and information. The action of "surfing" cyberspace as it appeared in cyberpunk works did not occur in many works before cyberpunk. Case, in William Gibson's *Neuromancer,* must don external wiring and a headpiece to sync with the cyberspace world that he "visually" witnesses through his mind. Tying to the chapter's epigraph, cyberspace in cyberpunk is as close to a physical location in the digital as one can get. Including characters such as Case, cyberpunk protagonists fit the description of an antihero, including occupations ranging from criminals, outcasts, visionaries, dissenters, misfits. Case, himself, fits the role of a "console cowboy" who finds odd jobs in cyberspace against any form of the corrupt power structure. As mentioned above, governments and law enforcement are mere shells of their previous forms. The monolithic skyscrapers of these cyberpunk worlds house megacorporations and zaibatsus that possess most of the world's wealth, subsequently running politics and standing above the law. A source of the megacorporations, particularly the idea of the *zaibatsu* (Japanese for "financial clique"), stems from the increasing presence and power among real-life companies and international hierarchies among Western and Japanese businesses alike. Now, with the essential foundation of what cyberpunk is and the central tenets of the genre outline established, it would serve to explore the evolution within science fiction that led to the cyberpunk writers to create their works. As science fiction experienced two major movements leading up to cyberpunk, the Golden Age and the New Wave, a breakdown of each from one to the other will connect the developments towards cyberpunk.

The Golden Age of science fiction brought the genre to a place of widespread public attention and standardized many of the tropes commonly attributed to the stereotypical image

of the genre. Where 80s cyberpunk extended the transitions set forth by the New Wave of the 60s and 70s, the New Wave transitioned from the boom of widespread appeal found in the Golden Age of the 40s and 50s. Following the era of the pulps in the early twentieth century, the Golden Age saw writers creating "hard science fiction" grounded in more realistic science with the grand space opera or adventure narratives one may see represented in George Lucas' *Star Wars* from 1977. Some of the notable writers of this period include E.E. "Doc" Smith, Isaac Asimov, and Robert Heinlein. Smith, notable works including the *Lensman* and *Skylark* series, commonly is attributed with the title of "father of the space opera." Isaac Asimov, known for his *Foundation* and *Robot* series, created works grounded deep on a scientific basis and established the Three Laws of Robotics that still permeate the genre to this day. Heinlein's early works in this era, such as *The Puppet Masters*, *Double Star*, and *Starship Troopers,* feature libertarian views that appear through Golden Age works. The Golden Age flourished partially in part to the post-atomic bomb interest in science that validated the interests and topics in these works. As the 1950s progressed, however, science fiction pulp publications condensed into fewer titles, and a general dissolution of the barriers between science fiction and science fact during the space race between the United States and Russia also brought a slow closure to the Golden Age. As new writers began to experiment with a more literary styling to science fiction, the genre took on a different tone to reflect a different time. With this change, the New Wave of science fiction began, and the content of these works brought new issues and ideas to the forefront of social discussion.

The New Wave of science fiction brought literary focus and formic and content experimentation to the genre, as a shift towards postmodern thinking mixed with socio-political contexts created "softer" works unlike that of preceding science fiction. As the world around

science fiction writers progressively collapsed into disarray, the feelings that technology or any significant action could solve all of the world's problems. The Cold War, the rise of conservative political power, social movements attempting to peacefully or radically create social change, and the rise of drug culture all coalesced into new inspirations for writers to comment on through their fiction. In terms of literary influences, science fiction writers of the late Golden Age and radicals from that era inspired some of the works that came during the New Wave. The Beat Generation and their works, notable examples including Allen Ginsberg's 1956 *Howl*, William S. Burrough's *Naked Lunch*, and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road,* rejecting standardized narratives and exploring everything from drugs to sex and the complex nuances of the human condition all inspired the New Wave as well. As Bruce Sterling lists in the preface of *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, the genre's inspirations include "From the New Wave: the streetwise edginess of Harlan Ellison. The visionary shimmer of Samuel Delany. The freewheeling zaniness of Norman Spinrad and the rock aesthetic of Michael Moorcock; the intellectual daring of Brian Aldiss; and always, J. G. Ballard."[3] To this, Philip K. Dick, writer of works including *Ubik, The Man in the High Castle*, *A Scanner Darkly*, and, of cyberpunk note, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, also served as a significant influence from the New Wave. Before transitioning to cyberpunk in this evolution, an assessment of social, political, and technological developments during the time of the New Wave, the 1960s and 1970s into the 1980s, will further contextualize the shift towards cyberpunk works.

[3] Bruce Sterling, "Preface," in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. Bruce Sterling (New York: Ace Books, 1988), x.

The rapid and multifaceted changes across global society left an ever-changing world that began to fit the image of a science fiction work, warts and all. As mentioned earlier, the punk movement, and counterculture movements in general, swept across the West, moving from England, in the case of punk, across Europe and the Atlantic to America. Not wanting to participate in the manufactured, copy-and-paste society that surrounded them, punks adopted a do-it-yourself attitude, and their fashion and music aesthetic reflected their nonconformity. A separate subculture that arose during this period is the hacker culture, whose fascination with computers and networks was sometimes dangerous. Before Tim Berners-Lee created the World Wide Web in 1989 while working at CERN in Switzerland, computing and networks existed, though those who could access these systems and have the technical know-how made the act of hacking a more niche hobby for a select few. The rise in home computing and the related developments of increased region networking also played a part in changing the world around the early cyberpunk writers. On a more macro level, megacorporations and global corporate rise in power through the 1980s and 1990s cemented some of the inspirations for cyberpunk parallels. Though antitrust laws existed and continue to exist, companies like Clear Channel and AT&T in the 1990s stand as prime examples of extended power beyond just small areas of influence. Japan, in particular, saw an astronomic rise as its economy and social influence through the 1980s saw the island nation rise from a notable post-war nation into a contender for a world superpower. Until their “Bubble” economy popped in the 1990s, many feared the influence and economic might of Japan. In the West, the political landscapes of Ronald Reagan and Margret Thatcher saw a conservative presence shift from government power to “Reaganomics” styles, where support given to the markets intended to provide a financial benefit for all. Civil rights, though not undermined, were neglected in enforcement,

and many practices usually attributed to a more liberal period saw little progress or development. All of these factors, moving across the social, political, and technological to the genre evolutions of the twentieth century, allowed for cyberpunk to manifest.

The cyberpunk movement, responding to the nearly innumerable changes of genre development and society, began in the 1980s with the intersection of a few significant moments. The first moment of note occurred with William Gibson releasing the short story, "Johnny Mnemonic," the first significant work to shift from Philip K. Dick's "proto-cyberpunk" works towards a more mainstream generic direction. Releasing a year after Gibson's short story, Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner* brought to the global stage the first visual work of what would become cyberpunk. The third significant moment occurred when sci-fi writer Bruce Bethke published a short story, "Cyberpunk," in 1983 that gave the movement its namesake. The fourth and final major catalyzing moment centers with William Gibson releasing *Neuromancer* in 1984, thereby cementing the movement and genre for audiences across the globe. With this, writers sharing similar themes within their works began publishing short stories and novels that would establish the early cyberpunk "canon." From here, "these writers – [William] Gibson, [Rudy] Rucker, [Lewis] Shiner, [John] Shirley, [Bruce] Sterling – found a friendly unity in their common outlook, common themes, even in certain oddly common symbols, which seemed to crop up in their work with a life of their own."[4] Immediately, more writers, filmmakers, and others contributed to what they envisioned cyberpunk to be, creating and defining the genre with each contribution. Before proceeding to the close reading of two cyberpunk films, the final discussion point revolves around

[4] Bruce Sterling, "Preface," in *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, ed. Bruce Sterling (New York: Ace Books, 1988), xi.

commenting on and listing out some of the essential works of the 1980s and 1990s cyberpunk.[5] Cyberpunk experienced changes in the 1990s, which will receive further extrapolation in conclusion, but these changes should not affect the brief introduction for the works below.

To begin, some of the English-language cyberpunk novel and short story writers worth noting include William Gibson, Rudy Rucker, Neal Stephenson, Bruce Sterling, Pat Cadigan, and John Shirley. Gibson, mentioned several times so far and more than several more times through this research, pioneered cyberpunk, plain and simple. Beginning with his short stories, including 1981's "The Gernsback Continuum" and "Johnny Mnemonic," Gibson helped catalyze momentum of the genre and his Sprawl Trilogy, consisting of *Neuromancer* (1984), *Count Zero* (1986), and *Mona Lisa Overdrive* (1986), stands as one of the genre's central collections. While "The Gernsback Continuum" is a less cyberpunk example of his short story work, "Johnny Mnemonic" places center stage cyberpunk iconography, including cranial data trafficking, organized crime, and dark, seedy urban cityscape. The Sprawl Trilogy, particularly the prolific *Neuromancer*, furthered some of the ideas, locations, and characters of "Johnny Mnemonic" and expanded it into a novel trilogy. Rudy Rucker, one of the original founding writers also wrote notable works, including his Ware Tetralogy (*Software*, *Wetware*, *Freeware*, and *Realware*), which explores artificial intelligence, human-machine hybridity, mortality and more. Neal Stephenson, though not a part of the original cyberpunks, wrote the influential *Snow Crash* in 1992, during the later cyberpunk to post-cyberpunk transition, which looked at cultural memetics, computer science, social functioning and a bit of Ancient Sumerian

[5] Something to make note of is that the following list centers mostly around Anglophone works, with several Japanese works also mentioned. The most prolific works of the genre usually come from either the Anglophone West or from Japan, so this list is not conclusive for all works from all regions, but just of the ones that appear across sources and discussions.

language and mythology. Bruce Sterling, another of the originals, wrote cyberpunk works including his 1988 *Islands in the Net* and the central *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology* in 1986, which assisted in cementing the genre as a collective effort and movement. Pat Cadigan, the only female writer of the original group, explored technology's relationship with the mind in her works, including the 1991 *Synners*. The last of the writers to mention is John Shirley, another of the originals, who wrote works including the Eclipse Trilogy, consisting of *Eclipse* (1985), *Eclipse Penumbra* (1988), and *Eclipse Corona* (1990), which applied cyberpunk ideas to a twenty-first-century Cold War-gone-hot. While there are other creators not mentioned here that played an integral part in the development of cyberpunk through literature, the individuals serve an example to some of the period's work.

From novels and short stories, the next grouping of works involves that of film and television, which includes anime works from Japan. Two pre-cyberpunk films that do not quite belong to cyberpunk but exhibit similar themes or atmospheres include Steven Lisberger's 1982 *TRON*, in which the film's protagonist enters into a digital software world, and John Carpenter's 1981 *Escape from New York*. In the case of *TRON*, the digital cyberspace presented fits the bill for early cyberpunk envisionings of cyberspace. In the case of *Escape from New York*, William Gibson himself found the film's attention to minute detailing and worldbuilding to be inspirational for what he would do with *Neuromancer*. 1982 saw Ridley Scott release *Blade Runner*, the film that would help spur forth the genre. George Stone, Annabel Jankel, and Rocky Morton's 1985 *Max Headroom: 20 Minutes into the Future* introduced the world to the witty "computer-generated personality" that would become a pop culture figure through the 1980s on. Paul Verhoven's 1987 *RoboCop* married cyberpunk, law enforcement, and the 80s action film into a unique take on the cyborg amidst the backdrop of a crime-ridden Detroit

of the dystopic near-future. Both *Blade Runner* and *RoboCop* can be considered works of Tech-Noir, a tangentially related subgenre of science fiction that married high technology with the traditional noir structuring. 1995 brought both Iain Softley's crime film *Hackers*, that was not cyberpunk but reflected the very culture that fed into and grew from cyberpunk, and Robert Longo's adaptation of the William Gibson short story of the same name, *Johnny Mnemonic*. While *Johnny Mnemonic* did not receive widespread acclaim or success, it did bring an adaptation of Gibson's particular styling of cyberpunk to the big screen. The final live-action film of note from this era that stands as one of the most iconic cyberpunk films is the Wachowski's 1999 *The Matrix*, that exemplified just about every dominant trope of cyberpunk from hooking up into a computer interface to the dark mirrored sunglasses worn by the characters. From Japan, the animated series *Bubblegum Crisis* (*Baburugamu Kuraishisu*) and the subsequent *Bubblegum Crash* (*Baburugamu Kurasshu!*) from 1987 to 1991 brought one of the mediums first cyberpunk animes over a dozen original video animations (OVAs). The series followed a group of female mercenaries that donned powered armor suits to fight rouge cybernetic life forms with the stereotypical cyberpunk world and backdrop. Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 *Akira* served as a significant bridge for anime in the West and shared a high-quality anime work from Otomo's cyberpunk-ish manga of the same name. In 1995, Mamoru Oshii adapted *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai*) Masamune Shirow's manga of the same name and brought one of Japanese anime's most iconic cyberpunk works to the world. Lastly, *Serial Experiments Lain* (*Shiriaru Ekusuperimentsu Rein*) from 1998 brought a cyberpunk-like technological exploration to late 1990s Japan that, much like the rest of the world at that time, had not yet experienced the full extent of what the internet would become for day-to-day life.

To wrap up the example texts of the genre, Japanese manga, comics, graphic novels, and tabletop games round out the multimedia extent of cyberpunk works. Not quite cyberpunk, the *Judge Dredd* comics from 1977 on presented a cyberpunk-ish dystopic urban world where a selected few acts as judge, jury, and executioner for the dark, gritty world around them. As mentioned above, Katsuhiro Otomo's 1988 *Akira* manga took inspiration from Scott's *Blade Runner* and created a unique dystopic "Neo-Tokyo" that faced socio-political turmoil and explorations of humanness when compared to human-technological experimentation. Masamune Shirow brought two major cyberpunk mangas to the world, with the first starting in 1985, *Appleseed* (*Appurushīdo*), and the second being 1989's *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai*). Both combine generic elements from Japanese mecha and western stylings of cyberpunk. Yukito Kishiro's 1990 through 1995 original run of *Battle Angel Alita* (*Gunnm*) added to the growing collection of Japanese cyberpunk manga, focusing on a female cyborg as she attempts to rediscover who she is and what she must do to avenge her past. The 1997 to 2002 DC Comics *Transmetropolitan* follows a renegade gonzo journalist working as the cyberpunk antihero trying to correct the wrongs of his cyberpunk dystopic America. To the realm of tabletop gaming, three role-playing games established either their takes on cyberpunk or allowed players to adapt cyberpunk tropes to their game worlds. Mike Pondsmith, with R. Talsorian Games, created *Cyberpunk* in 1988. This gaming system, also known under the later versions of *Cyberpunk 2020* and *Cyberpunk V3.0*, developed its cyberpunk world that would allow players to immerse themselves in whatever cyberpunk fantasy they wished to experience. In a similar vein, FASA's 1989 *Shadowrun* (which still exists under the ownership of Catalyst Game Labs) did what *Cyberpunk 2020* did with a mixture of cyberpunk and the fantasy of a *Dungeons and Dragons* game. The famous *GURPS* system from Steve Jackson Games

released *GURPS Cyberpunk* in 1990, allowing players to take generic cyberpunk tropes and icons into whatever game they wished. Notably, the United States Secret Service confiscated the early drafts of the manuscript for some time under the assertion of it being a "handbook for computer crime."

Cyberpunk exists thanks to the convergence of dozens of concurrent happenings that allowed the perfect storm of creativity to flourish. From the punk movement to Japanese manga and hacking culture to Secret Service raids, cyberpunk in the 1980s and 1990s expressed its take as science fiction on the world around itself and the potential direction that the world was heading. Now, given this brief contextual foundation of the genre, its origins, and influential texts, a close reading of two cyberpunk films, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*, will explore in more depth some of the nuance and ideas present through much of the cyberpunk works across mediums. Discussing these two films will extract some points to explore further in the present-day context, which appears in the conclusion of this work. To begin, let us examine the film that catalyzed the cyberpunk movement.

Chapter Two

Tears in Rain: Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*

"*Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave.*"

- Roy Batty to Rick Deckard, *Blade Runner*

Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner* exemplifies the exploration and experimentation of genre conventions and storytelling practices, particularly concerning cyberpunk, present in the early 1980s. Coming off the success of *Alien*, Ridley Scott loosely adapted Phillip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Scott's film shares similar story beats from Dick's novel but diverges in parts to become something of its own. *Blade Runner* became a standard-setting film for Hollywood, the neo-noir genre, and for what would become cyberpunk. Blending the stylings of the 1940s and 1950s noir and science fiction tropes and imagery, *Blade Runner* incorporates action, noir mystery and intrigue, and socio-philosophical commentary into a distinctive hybrid of genre and style. It is in this hybridity and expansion of Dick's novel that allowed *Blade Runner* to catalyze the formation of cyberpunk as a genre.

Scott's ability to materialize imagery and detail into a physical manifestation of intangible concepts serves as one of the central impacts of this text. Scott balances filmic tropes found in romance (such as Deckard and Rachael's relationship), noir (with a detective tracking down criminals through a dark, seedy underworld while walking the line of law and crime themself), and action (through the fight sequences that occur between Deckard and the

replicants). Also, Scott did all of that while developing this story in a new-to-screen science fiction environment that departs from the previous status quo of space operas or the alien-based stylings of its contemporaries (George Lucas' 1977 *Star Wars*; Ridley Scott's 1979 *Alien*). The megalopolis of 2019's Los Angeles, obscured with enough chiaroscuro lighting to give the feeling of a black-and-white film, oozes imagery and emotions of decay, claustrophobia, and malaise. Beyond his contributions to generic creation, Ridley Scott achieved in this film what was to become commonplace as the decade progressed: an expensive grandiose film meant to draw audiences in from directorial acclaim and a film spectacle. While *Blade Runner* did not become the blockbuster Hollywood expected, *Blade Runner* stands the tests of time as both a cult classic and essential work from Hollywood in the 1980s. Moreover, in particular importance for cyberpunk, the film brought to life the worlds that William Gibson and the cyberpunk writers were imagining up in their stories before the release of the genre's seminal work, *Neuromancer*. Ridley Scott's fusion of genres and the use of varied generic styles in *Blade Runner* allowed for the cyberpunk writers to witness the success of work not too different from their own and further capitalize on the interest and curiosities of fans the world over.

Before providing a summary of the film, it would prove useful for understanding the following analysis by establishing a choice made about the version of the film used for analysis. This research looks solely at *Blade Runner: The Final Cut*, the film's most recent rerelease in 2007 as Ridley Scott intended it. While a comparison of the various cuts would be advantageous, it exceeds the scope of this present research. The Director's Cut and the Final Cut each present the film as close as Scott originally envisioned it. However, the aesthetic choices of adding a steel-green color grading to the film and extended sequences of violence

and gore add to the desired effect of the tech-noir landscape and a grim, downtrodden world. Additionally, while I consider directorial intent a critical consideration for the analysis of any text, as is the case for this text, in particular, I believe a neutral interpretation of Deckard's status as a replicant allows for a consideration of the possibility of both without definitely placing one over the other. Scott thinks that Deckard is a replicant, while others who worked on the film argue against this point. The film heavily implies that Deckard is a replicant but leaves it for the audience to decide. This research will use this ambiguity and the implication of "replicanthood" in comparing the figures of Deckard and Batty.

The film follows retired detective Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) as he hunts down a group of rouge synthetic humans, called replicants, in a near-future dystopic Los Angeles. Deckard served as a blade runner, a specialized law enforcer who "retires" (kills) designated replicants who break from their assigned roles, for the LAPD, and it is his experience that makes his former superior call him back into duty. Deckard's task consists of retiring a group of rogue replicants, led by Roy Batty (Rutger Hauer), from an off-world colony who have returned to Earth in search of their creator, Eldon Tyrell of the Tyrell Corporation (Joe Turkel). Batty and his crew wish to extend their short, four-year life spans and believe that Tyrell can do it. As Deckard hunts the group of four, he becomes romantically involved with another replicant of Tyrell's, Rachael (Sean Young), whom Tyrell created without a designated lifespan, and begins to question his order to kill replicants at large. As Deckard whittles the rogue replicants numbers, he faces his humanity, or lack thereof, considering these replicants, especially the persistent devotion of Batty and the naivete and loss of identity present in Rachael. In the film's final moments, faced with Batty saving his life, Batty's subsequent death, and his attraction towards Rachael, Deckard and Rachael step into the elevator out of

his apartment with the implication being that they are going to escape Los Angeles to live their lives. Earlier versions of the film contain a voice-over scene with them riding off into the North, but the Final Cut merely leaves this as an implied follow up.

Othered Landscapes and Othered Peoples: Personhood and Place in *Blade Runner*

Deckard at the Street Vendor – (7:25-9:35)

This sequence follows the second one of the film, in which one of Batty's replicants fails to take the Voight-Kampff exam that detects replicants and kills the blade runner tasked with administering the exam. As this sequence transitions from the previous ones drawn out calm into a dramatic turn into violence, feelings of unease carry into succeeding shots of the imposing cityscape. Throughout the first half, a master shot from within the urban landscape, high angles looking up into the urban sprawl, and low angles looking down through the diverse, crowded streets all contribute to establishing the atmosphere present at the street level in this depiction of a dystopic 2019 Los Angeles. The second half quickly contextualizes Deckard among the hierarchy of the LAPD as an officer comes to collect him under the threat of arrest for no actual crime. I intend to explore the "othering" of the landscape and the power dynamics that surround Deckard in my analysis.

The use of elaborate sets allows for futuristic, noir, and archaic visual elements to meld into a cohesive whole of its parts, neither entirely past, present, or future. The Los Angeles depicted in *Blade Runner* stands far from recognizable from the Los Angeles of the 1980s, but it represents a world that reflects the fears and worries of many during the period. The rise of Japan, socially and economically, in the global market, the growth of ever-present megacorporations, and the furthering separation between the elite oppressors and the

commonplace suppressed all come to ahead in the world created for the film. Globalization, in addition to the previous points among more, materializes from the onset of the opening scenes with the grand scale establishing shot above the Los Angeles cityscape, with towering mega skyscrapers and industrial chimney stacks roaring fire into the sky (3:05 – 3:49). The use of practical miniatures allows for the cameras to track across the cityscape and between buildings to illustrate the immensity and scale present. When combined with almost seamless transitions to shots on sets, the practical miniature sets become further isolated from the familiar and the known. As flying cars, called spinners, soar through a labyrinth of openings between buildings, the scaling between man and creation appears in full, primarily when shot from the perspective of an individual on the ground looking up towards the advertising blimps floating above the city streets (7:25 – 7:46). The dark city illuminated by neon and artificial lights calls to mind the image of an urban cityscape present in noir. However, *Blade Runner* furthers this image with futuristic building-sized holographic advertisements of Coca-Cola and Japanese Geishas selling products (DV 7:25 – 7:33). Each minute example from various scenes lends to the ever-pervasive nature of place, both on the part of an individual's physical position and the individual's social position. The world is overbearing in scale, and physical presence, creating a distancing or othering of the cityscape itself. *Blade Runner*'s sets allow for the display of social and economic variance and disparity that transcends time or place.

The employment of chiaroscuro blurs definitive existence in identity and the environment, incorporating noir obscurity of characters and place with a science fiction reflection on the self and the other. Keeping in the traditional tropes set from the films of classical noir, *Blade Runner* employs sharp contrast between light and shadow, artificial and natural, and, by extension, the moral ambiguity of right and wrong. The artificial lights of the

expansive skyscraper network contrast the darkness of the ever-dim sky to illustrate the separation of man and the created machines from the natural order of things. These images also create imagery that appears continuously in cyberpunk worlds of an Orientalized cityscape reminiscent of Hong Kong and Tokyo, with the skyscrapers and neon filling any sight from above or below. In the scene of Deckard on a crowded street filled with shops, neon, and walkers (evocative of the cities previously mentioned) waiting for a spot at the vendor's stand, the complete illumination of the street from neon and advertisements illustrate the pervasive artificiality of Los Angeles' manufactured cityscape (7:46 – 8:13). The fact that no natural light makes it that far down shows the separation of the average citizenry from a natural existence, living in shadow and unnatural squalor. The rain that also seems to be ever-present further blurs the lights and adds to a noir urban atmosphere. Through the artificial lighting commenting on the social disparities of the city's inhabitants, *Blade Runner* blends noir and science fiction through light and shadow to explore the environment and characters present in the film.

When viewed in collaboration, the practical miniatures and lighting of both miniature and life-sized sets create a fictional replication of what, at the time, one could equate to Hong Kong or, in part, Tokyo. Wong Kin Yuen, writing about the Hong Kong-esque cityscape present in *Blade Runner* and *Ghost in the Shell*, notes his fascination "by the dazzling visuals of *Blade Runner*'s Ridleyville, its seamless weaving of the futuristic and the traditional, as well as its paradoxical delighting of the eye through an emphasis on urban squalor."[6] Yuen goes on to express that the "hybrid spaces, crowdedness, the polyglot or mishmash city-speak, the

[6] Wong Kin Yuen, "On the Edge of Spaces: *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and Hong Kong's Cityscape," in *Science Fiction Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2000, 4.

chaotic proliferation of neon billboards above futuristic shopping arcades, the rain-soaked streets and dragon signs" all draw him to conclude that this depiction of a 2019 Los Angeles is almost that of Hong Kong in the late twentieth century.[7] Yuen's attention to these details demonstrates the power that set and lighting hold not only in creating this world but in allowing it to manifest in a way parallel to that of real-world Hong Kong.

Inherently, in comparing Scott's 'Ridleyville' as being visually and socially similar to Hong Kong, these comments smuggle an Orientalist view of the film (as in Edward W. Said's *Orientalism*), or at the very least this dichotomy of the "other" between what is western and what is eastern. Said remarks at one point in *Orientalism* that:

> "For the Orient ('out there' towards the East) is corrected, even penalized, for lying outside the boundaries of European society, 'our' world; the Orient is thus Orientalized, a process that not only marks the Orient as the province of the Orientalist but also forces the uninitiated Western reader to accept Orientalist codifications…as the *true* Orient."[8]

Scott brings the East and West together in a marriage of iconography in his cyberpunk world that makes the two inseparable one from the other. The points that Yuen makes each provide excellent examples for lengthy analysis, with the particular instance of 'the polyglot or mishmash city-speak' serving a prime example. Some characters move between several languages in a moment of speaking or within a single sentence. The diversity of the city's inhabitants has allowed for the new language to emerge that fuses words and phrases from East

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[7] Ibid.

[8] Edward Said, "Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental," in *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003 ed), 67

and West into a modern vernacular for the street. The ‘other’ combines with the familiar to blur the boundaries between the two.

The scaling of sets and the profilmic environment present relationships of power between individuals with their environment, commenting on the socio-economic stratification between the elite and the poor. *Blade Runner* reflected the growing fears surrounding socio-economic class disparities between the top and bottom among society during the 1980s, presenting these fears through the framing form of the film. Opposed to filming real cityscapes, the use of practical miniatures in the movie allows for an exaggeration of scale that highlights the separation of the elite in their figurative ivory towers from the dregs on the streets. The expansive sprawl of the film’s near-future L.A. extends far more than any contemporary city, and the use of miniatures allowed the film to create this enormous cityscape to its desired fictitious scale. As the film opens, the sprawling cityscape isolates the audience from anything that could remotely resemble a familiar city skyline (3:05 – 3:49). The occasional spinner skycar appears on screen like a speck of dust compared to the size of the buildings and expanse of the cityscape underneath. The shots preceding Deckard going to the street vendor continue the remoteness of the viewer. However, these shots bring the camera closer to buildings and building features that appear to be closer to a recognizable scale. The shot of spinners passing by building-sized advertisements (7:25 – 7:33) places the power of corporations and the elite physically above the existence of the citizenry who reside below. This portrayal furthers when a low angle shot of an advertising blimp passes above the city street blaring about going to the off-world colonies at a volume that is all but able to be ignored by those who could not afford to make that trip even if they desired (7:33 – 7:46; 8:13 – 8:18). These shots add to the broader feeling of despair and entrapment of those residing in the lower levels of this dystopic cesspit.

Blade Runner combines the dark, grittiness of noir with social commentary to reflect the menacing presence of corporations through omnipresent advertising and physical manifestations of power and greed in the form of megastructures that reach the clouds. Through these extreme depictions, the film sheds new light on the urban reality of the late twentieth century into the twenty-first century.

The usage of different camera positions between characters shows the diversity of power dynamics between characters, displaying the hierarchical dispersion of power through gender, profession, and social lines. Moving from an environmental-based showing of power dynamics, relationships between characters continue to appear as camera placement illustrates dominance and subservience. In the sequence of Deckard at the street vendor, most individuals are minding their own business and either walking or sitting alone. As Deckard sits to his meal at the vendor's stand, Officer Gaff (Edward James Olmos) and another uniformed officer appear behind Deckard and detain him. The shots show Deckard seated centered in the frame with Gaff and the officer walking up behind him on either side as only torsos with their heads out of shot (8:56 – 9:12). The intentional dissection of the officers in the shot creates intrigue for their identities but also focuses attention on the seated Deckard, who shows little interest or care to his detainers. Deckard speaks to Gaff indirectly while the camera cuts up to a shot of Gaff looking down at Deckard (9:17 – 9:22; 9:24 – 9:25). These shots of Gaff confirm that he holds power above, figuratively and literally, Deckard. It is not until Gaff mentions Deckard's superior in LAPD that Deckard looks up to speak directly to Gaff. The short durations of Gaff's shots, in combination with his power over Deckard, display the power dynamic of Gaff over Deckard and the LAPD supervisor over the two of them. *Blade Runner* combines noir aesthetics and social commentary, reflecting contemporary concerns into a

removed examination of society and the relationship of power between man and the environment and between individuals in the societal hierarchy. The framing form of the film allows the audience to participate in these dynamics with the allure of Scott's dystopic science fiction world.

More Human than Human: Roy Batty's Demise

Roy Batty's Final Moments – (1:45:15-1:47:50)

This sequence presents the final moments of Roy Batty, including two impactful spoken moments of the character that I believe establish him as not only one of the essential figures in the film but cyberpunk mythos at large. The first moment of note occurs when Deckard is hanging on the edge of a building, and Roy Batty saves him from impending death from falling. This chapter's epigraph is the line Batty speaks to Deckard before pulling him up, a quote that I believe reflects again the power dynamics of the master and servant relationship held between replicants and humans. The second moment, one that is arguably one of the most famous from the film and cyberpunk as well as one of cinema's iconic film moments, is Roy Batty's "Tears in Rain" speech, which correctly surmises the idea of replicant personhood that is disregarded and ignored by most humans. I desire to contemplate the role of the servant, subaltern replicant figure, in contrast to that of their human masters. Additionally, I wish to use this analysis as an ideological springboard for the next section of this work looking at the posthumanism present in *Ghost in the Shell* and the idea of self within a cyborg figure (a replicant in *Blade Runner* and most of the characters in *Ghost in the Shell).*

Purposeful framing through high and low angle shots crescendo the tension building up through the prior scenes to a climactic moment of choice for Roy Batty. Through this two

minute and thirty-five-second sequence, Roy Batty is the only character speaking, with Deckard in silence. Our first set of lines occurs as Deckard is slipping from holding onto the edge of a rooftop, as a torrential downpour engulfs him and the on-looking Roy Batty. Batty, looking down at Deckard, with a low-angle close-up (1:45:15-19; 1:45:20-24), says, "Quite an experience to live in fear, isn't it? That's what it is to be a slave." Breaking up these two lines into shots with a head and shoulder insert of Deckard struggling on the rooftop edge contextualizes the almost irony of Deckard's situation with Batty as his only hope. This reality juxtaposes with the fact that Batty and his group have not only lived in fear of death and their dangerous servitude, but Deckard has been the one hunting each one of them down throughout the film. While Deckard stands as the film's protagonist, Batty drives the movie through his arc from wanting to find Tyrell and fix his problem of mortality towards this inevitable acceptance of death and finality. As Batty finishes these minimal lines, there is a cut to Deckard as he finally cannot hold on any longer and falls, with Batty holding grabbing him with one hand and pulling him back over the edge onto the rooftop (1:45:33-56). In an almost Christ-like manner, Batty, illuminated through the darkness by bright lights from the buildings, lifts Deckard with a nail through his right hand (1:45:41-43) while still holding onto a white dove in his left. Batty, at this moment, no longer represents the dangerous, violent replicant that he has up to this point, but as a savior that will save those that killed his friends but attempted to kill him as well. This moment begins Batty anew or possibly marks the end of his growth and development as a character, though this marks his final moments.

The sequence's minimalist dialogue draws the audience to reflect on and evaluate Roy Batty's final words for their character-based and filmic-based purpose. After saving Deckard, Batty sits down near him, holding the white dove in his lap, and begins what will serve as his

last words, a dying soliloquy that affirms to himself that he lived a life of note and allows Deckard to contextualize the life and loss of this being, human or not. Batty, looking towards Deckard, says:

> I've…seen things you people wouldn't believe…Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion…I watched C-Beams…glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate…All those…moments will be lost…in time…like…tears in rain…Time…to die.

I believe that these simple phrases, lacking in detailed explanation, provide powerful insight into the character of Roy Batty. He lived a life with moments and sights that most people could not imagine, and, despite this truth, he will die, and those experiences and memories will fade away "like tears in rain." W.A. Senior, in his essay "*Blade Runner* and Cyberpunk Visions of Humanity," encapsulates the underpinning issue presented by Batty at this moment, saying, "Replicants were built to be human in almost every way, yet they are denied human status, like many of the others who cannot qualify for off-world placement, in a technologically racist society that views them as disposable slaves."[9] Batty's words reflect this reality that in being "nonhuman," he and his kind are less than human. The Tyrell Corporation produces replicants to perform the tasks that humans do not want to and treats them no differently than subservient slave labor. So, baked into the concept of the replicant is the matter of posthuman existence of being created to be humanlike (and arguably no different to that of humans) and the issue of this subaltern group that possesses enough awareness to question why they are in the position that they are in from their human masters. Additional analysis of *Blade Runner* as a whole film

[9] W.A. Senior, "*Blade Runner* and Cyberpunk Visions of Humanity" in *Film Criticism*, vol. 21, no. 1, 1996, 4.

or possibly as a franchise with later entries could expand the discussion of these two points. However, for the time being, I will use these questions to demonstrate the concepts that *Blade Runner* brought forth intending to come back to them in my analysis of *Ghost in the Shell*.

Blade Runner and Its Importance to Cyberpunk

Despite not seeing financial and cultural success until well after its original theatric run, Ridley Scott's 1982 *Blade Runner* served as a catalyst and seminal visual for the development of the cyberpunk genre. Taking elements of Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Scott developed a world that was reminiscent of works in film noir from the 1940s and 1950s, with the dark, gritty underworld feel and the detective crime story iconic of the genre. This aesthetic and world-building helped establish what the Neuromantic writers intended for cyberpunk. *Blade Runner* did not become the blockbuster success of other films coming out in the late 1970s and 1980s, but it served as an example for what Hollywood films could be moving into the 1980s and onwards to the present day. Ridley Scott forged a film that incorporated tropes and filmic elements found in noir, action, drama, romance, and science fiction. The film also revolutionized film technology and techniques that would take hold in film making moving forward. Beyond its influences on cinema, *Blade Runner* became one of many films that found a cult following that continues to last nearly forty years after its release. The expensive cost of the film may have played in its reception as a financial hit to Warner Brothers, with the film making $32.9 million from a budget of $30 million. Regardless, *Blade Runner*, as a film in Hollywood, left an impact that would change Hollywood and global cinema.

The further success of Scott's fusion of works and genres manifests in its role as a catalyst for the cyberpunk works that would follow within the next couple of years. William

Gibson's *Neuromancer* appeared on shelves within a couple of years after the film's release and furthered imagery and ideas that emerged in *Blade Runner*. Also, the film made it abroad to cinemas around the world, wherein the case of Japan, a group of new science fiction authors, artists, and directors, would find influence in the film and would go on to create works ranging from Katsuhiro Otomo's manga and film *Akira,* Shinya Tsukamoto's film *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*, Masamune Shirow's *Ghost in the Shell* manga, and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* film. Ridley Scott created a work of art that set standards for Hollywood films and global cinema that came after it and showed the possibility of what a movie could be when the generic tropes served as guidelines and not law.

Chapter Three

Human Beyond Human: Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*

> "*Man is an individual only because of his intangible memory. But memory cannot be defined, yet it defines mankind.*"
>
> - The Puppet Master to Major Motoko Kusanagi, *Ghost in the Shell*

Mamoru Oshii's 1995 *Ghost in the Shell* (*Kōkaku Kidōtai*) continues tropes, imagery, and ideas set forth by early cyberpunk works, including *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer*, while taking an approach of a more philosophically-reflective work.[10] Oshii's film adapts Masamune Shirow's manga, the originating text in which the inevitable franchise stands rooted within. Shirow created a dystopic cyberpunk world of megacorporations, intricate governmental power structures, and a cyberized and technologized society at all levels from the common everyday man to the corporate elite. The film adaptation of this world exposed western audiences to this eastern cyberpunk entry that displays visual and narrative commonalities with its western counterparts, such as Major Kusanagi being a deadly female cyborg in the vein of Pris from *Blade Runner* or Molly Millions from *Neuromancer*. Again, mixing filmic genres from action to that of mystery, *Ghost in the Shell* added to the conversation present within

[10] *Ghost in the Shell* comes from the manga's subtitle, "*The Ghost in the Shell*," but the original manga and film both share the original Japanese name for the franchise of *Kōkaku Kidōtai*. Despite wanting the manga's title to be *Ghost in the Shell*, Masamune Shirow's publishers felt that *Kōkaku Kidōtai*, literally *Mobile Armored Riot Police*, would be a better name. "Ghost in the Shell" is an homage to Arthur Koestler's *The Ghost in the Machine*, a work that inspired Shirow when creating the manga.

cyberpunk works, while serving the unique role of bridging Eastern and Western takes on what the genre entailed for audiences.

Opposed to being strictly rooted in the evolution of western science fiction, *Ghost in the Shell* exists at the nexus of several developments, notably the evolution of the mecha genre in Japanese popular culture. As articulated by Joseph Schaub in his article, "Kusanagi's Body: Gender and Technology in Mecha-anime," "Mecha-anime are primarily science fiction narratives, often taking place in dystopian futuristic cityscapes where advanced technology figures prominently…The literary equivalent of mecha-anime is the genre known as cyberpunk."[11] Mecha usually centers around stories involving giant mechanical figures controlled by humans in some capacity fighting other robots, mecha, or people. It may be best to look at mecha's evolution in terms of Christian Metz's Four Stages of Genre to understand the genre's development from giant robots to cyberpunk cyborgs. The "primitive" works of the genre see humans controlling the giant mechanical creations via radio waves or remote control, with examples of this being the 1956 manga *Tetsujin 28-go* and its 1963 anime adaptation *Gigantor*. From the "primitive," the next stage of a genre is classical, and *Mobile Suit Gundam* stands as an essential example at the heart of what mecha represents with humans piloting their giant robots from within the machine itself. The third stage, and final for this discussion, is that of a text being "revisionist," something that I believe cyberpunk and, in this case, *Ghost in the Shell* both reflect. Major Kusanagi and other cyborg figures in the film and cyberpunk works generally take the idea of a human controlling a mechanical creation and combine the mechanical into the self.

[11] Joesph Christopher Schaub, "Kusanagi's Body: Gender and Technology in Mecha-anime," in *Asian Journal of Communications*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2001, 80.

Now, where *Ghost in the Shell* stands apart from most mecha and differs slightly from most cyberpunk is the focus on a self-reflective philosophical exploration of the underlying questions at the heart of the genre. The handling of this exploration comes in on two connected fronts: the intentioned or unintentional reference to academic theory; and a presentation of the narrative that results in individual viewers contemplating the film's content. In the case of academic theory, the previously mentioned Christian Metz theory of genre development, Laura Mulvey's theory surrounding the male gaze, and Donna Haraway's work of the figure of the cyborg concerning gender studies all pertain to the narrative, and sub-textual conversations threaded through this work. Susan Napier, in her book, *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle*, expresses the secondary point surrounding audience reflection, saying, "*Ghost in the Shell* is a genuinely metaphysical work that is concerned less with individual identity in society than with such philosophical questions as whether one can possess a soul in an increasingly technological age."[12] Extending beyond moments of noir-esque mise en scène reminiscent of *Blade Runner* and computer hackers not too distant from those found in Gibson's works, *Ghost in the Shell* takes its characters into a place of reflection and metaphysical pondering. Individuals, such as Major Kusanagi, explore their "humanness" when they exist almost purely as a brain, spinal cord, and a collection of memories that ultimately belong to their governmental overseers. Others, such as the Puppet Master, illustrate some of the moral dilemmas that arise when an artificial intelligence develops its sense of self and desire to be free from the constraints of its creators. In turn, a viewer versed in academic theory can contemplate the film through those lenses, but someone unaware of these theories may just as well walk away from this work with similar thoughts and feelings. The close reading of

[12] Susan J. Napier, "Doll Parts: Technology and the Body in *Ghost in the Shell*," in *Anime from Akira to Howl's Moving Castle* (New York: St. Martin's Griifin, 2005), 104.

selected sequences below will shed further insight into this nature of *Ghost in the Shell*. It is worth making a note of this difference from other cyberpunk works before the analysis to provide awareness and a working foundation of understanding.

The film follows Public Security Section 9 in the near-future dystopic sprawl of "New Port City, Japan," notably Major Motoko Kusanagi, Batou, Togusa, and Chief Daisuke Aramaki, as they hunt down the film's hacker antagonist, the Puppet Master. Kusanagi, as well as every other member of the team, excluding Togusa, is cyberized to some extent, with the Major herself possessing a high-tech cyborg "shell" that houses her cyberbrain incasing her brain and, by extension, her "ghost." After a series of events stemming from a programmer's attempted departure from the country, Section 9 becomes increasingly involved with the hunt for the Puppet Master. In the final third of the film, the Puppet Master's identity as a "rogue computer program turned artificial intelligence" sets the stage for a faceoff between Section 9 and other governmental agencies attempting to take back the Puppet Master before it can escape into the internet. Running parallel to the developments with the Puppet Master, Kusanagi begins to engage in increasingly metaphysical ponderings about her identity and personhood when faced with the ordeal surrounding the Puppet Master. Her body and the classified memories that make up her identity belong to Section 9, and to leave her post would mean losing her body and memories. Would she be the same person without them? The film's climactic moments see a "marriage" of identities and minds as Kusanagi, and the Puppet Master merge into one being, creating an "offspring" that represents both identities as one, free to move in and out of the web and physical forms as they wish.

"Diving" into the Abyss: The Dualities of Kusangai's Posthuman Cyborg Body

Kusanagi's Dive off a Building – (2:09-2:30;3:50-4:06); Kusanagi's "Birth" – (4:06-8:20); and Kusanagi's Dive into the Bay – (27:50-29:00)

Three particular sequences establish the duality surrounding Kusanagi's cyborg body and the basic posthuman questions that arise with these dualities. The first sequence involves Kusanagi jumping off the ledge of a skyscraper and then her next jump from the windowed area where she assassinates a high-level government official from a hostile country who attempts to provide refuge for the programmer mentioned above attempting to flee Japan. The dual nature of Kusanagi as human and nonhuman, powerful and vulnerable, and, finally, present and absent. A final detail of note is the possible reading of the fetishized female body in this sequence with Kusanagi stripping into the nude to make her jump. Juxtaposing this sequence, the following one interlaces the title card and opening credits with shots of Kusanagi's body's construction. This display of "birth" further illustrates the three dualities mentioned above, as well as presenting an opposite view of the female body not as a fetishized and sexualized form but one created, though notably created through a mechanical and technological process. The final sequence of this section concludes the analysis of diving and rising shared between these three with Kusanagi scuba diving in the bay, where apparent parallels manifest between this moment and the birth sequence earlier in the film. The intent in addressing these three sequences together without the depth of exploring every nuance present is to establish a broader presence of the imagery surrounding Kusanagi's body as the posthuman and corporeal representative of the film's ideas surrounding personhood and identity. The final sequence continues directly with the discussion between Kusanagi and Batou analyzed in the next section of this chapter.

The choice of chiaroscuro lighting, tight medium to long shots, and the realistic animation of the world and Kusangai's corporeality come together to highlight Kusanagi's cyborg form and the various dualities it represents. Given that this first sequence sets the tone for the film, it is equally crucial that sequence establishes the role of Kusanagi and, whether intentioned or not, lets the viewer understand Kusanagi as an almost nonhuman figure. Setting the tone for what is to come, the opening shots show a nighttime cityscape that focuses in on a squatting Kusanagi, clad in a dark coat and mirrored sunglasses (0:48-1:09). She and her immediate surroundings appear mostly obscured and darkened. It is until she strips off her coat to reveal her nude body, lacking genitalia through still having breasts (which establish her as more female than strictly androgynous) that her light skin lightens the shot as a contrast to the muted greyscale of the rooftops (1:40-1:45). All this while, the camera shots[13] from medium to long distances feel as if they are more in line with a tight, closeup shot. Kusanagi sitting on the rooftop and then standing feels less like a medium or long shot and draws the viewer's eye towards her. It may be best to acknowledge now that one might make the argument that the viewer may be drawn to Kusanagi, particularly in her nude form, as representative of Laura Mulvey's theory about the male gaze. However, the attention to a realistic depiction of corporeality in the animation married with the unique "otherness" present in the cyborg body that contains elements of a female form while also being noticeably different leads towards a possibility beyond mere male gaze. The final shot of this opening sequence shows Kusanagi as she jumps from the window area of the building, out towards the cityscape below (3:50-4:05). As she slowly disappears into the cityscape, given her thermoptic camo renders her

[13] I use this phrasing because, despite being an animated work, this film, as many animated works do, employs the same stylings and processes found in live-action filmmaking. Though some animated works lie outside the realistic, *Ghost in the Shell* stands as an example of one grounded in a realistic depiction of the world that it shows.

"invisible" and again draws into these dualities present in her. She leaps from the building, portraying a power in herself, but is as equally vulnerable, only held to the roof by a simple metal cable. She is present in her physical form but is absent once her camo removes her from the character's vision and the audience. Kusanagi concurrently is built into a human and nonhuman cyborg, a particular duality that leads into the following sequence.

The succinct nature of the series of shots depicting the construction of Major Kusanagi's body allows for juxtaposing ideas to stand adjacent to one another while the audience witnesses her posthuman cyborg creation. Immediately following the opening sequence, this one interlaces the opening credits with short scenes lasting at most several seconds depicting the process of assembling Kusanagi's body. The two shots that make up the first of this series of micro scenes depict the faceplate of her head sliding into place and a digital scan of her brain, one of the few organic components left of herself (4:14-4:18; 4:18-4:21). Following this, a credit for Masamune Shirow appears on the screen, juxtaposing the Major's creation with a meta illustration towards the individual who created the character (4:21-4:26). These juxtapositions continue to appear over the next four minutes as the limbs and torso become one body, as this body receives skin and hair, and eventually, as the body becomes the Major herself, mind and body as one. This entire sequence again establishes the duality between the human body present in the previous sequence pre-credits and the nonhuman cyborg that slowly becomes human in appearance as the credits proceed towards their conclusion. The metal and sinew of the body appear powerful. At the same time, the vulnerability of the mechanical creation also stands apparent as this metal casing holds the last remnants of a once-human being. The absence of life and personhood plays into the sequence

as this lifeless body floats through the steps of creation until, in the end, we see what the final product manifests into, the Major herself.

Kusanagi becomes the personification for the film's questions of identity and personhood through the opening moments of the film, establishing the foundation of philosophically-driven dialogue that will follow suit through the film's run time. The first two sequences of *Ghost in the Shell* provide context to Kusanagi's posthuman body and condition. She represents the cyborg, not too different from the ideas present in Donna Haraway's early scholarly works[14]. Susan Napier talks to this point of Haraway's cyborg and Kusanagi, saying:

> In some ways Kusanagi fits comfortably into scholar Donna Haraway's vision of the cyborg as a creature without human limitations. For Haraway, the cyborg is a liberating entity 'not afraid of [its] joint kinship with animals and machines,' 'a creature in a post gender world.' Thus, the birth scene shows Kusanagi as both organically and technologically constructed but totally free of human origins.[15]

Napier's interpretation and application of Haraway's work further cement the dichotomies around Kusanagi. It is in these opposing images that the Major finds her lack of knowledge for herself and what she wants from the world. While these sequences lack the answers to these questions, they only make up the first eight minutes of the film and establish a foundation for the audience to take the journey towards answers with the Major.

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[14] Whie inclusion of Donna Haraway's work would further enrich the analysis of this research, her research does not fit the scope of this work. In future expansions of this research, Haraway will be addressed properly.
[15] Susan J. Napier, "Doll Parts: Technology and the Body in *Ghost in the Shell*," 106-107.

The variety of shots situating Major Kusanagi amidst the dark depths of the water and the sepia tones of the sunset sky draws attention to her cyborg body and her inner conflict surrounding her posthuman identity. The relatively short sequence from 27:50 to 29:00 shows the Major as she dives deep into the dark blue waters of the bay outside of the city. A long shot dwarfs Kusanagi against the backdrop of the water (27:58-28:02). She descends until reaching the desired depth and stops her dive with the apparatus on her back. This image of her floating in the water during this scene calls to mind similar moments from the birth sequence where her floating body sits in a sea of liquid. To further this parallel, she ascends much as her body did during construction, before finally pausing just below the surface to provide a mirrored surface to present two images of the Major, a corporeal form and a mirrored reflection (28:28-28:30). The dark blue of the water contrasted with the warm sepia further contrasts the two selves and the inner conflict present in Kusanagi. As stated before, this particular sequence carries into the next section, where the next four minutes result from, in part, from this dive in the water. The discussion in the film between characters about Kusanagi diving like this appears below. However, this brief analysis here serves more to connect these two sections and to exemplify the series of dualities surrounding the Major and her cyborg body. Presented through imagery and the physical manner of animation in the film, these three moments of the film show rather than tell these dualisms. The conversation between Major Kusanagi and Batou in the next scene and chapter section serves more for the broader dialogues present through the film surrounding personhood and the cyborg body. Again, Kusanagi's inner conflicts become manifested in these scenes, where her humanness and nonhumanness, powerful image and vulnerable image, and presence and absence all become apparent through external means.

Now, the inner dialogue of Kusanagi bounced off of Batou will encapsulate the dimensions of these ideas.

The "Ghost" in the "Shell": Personhood in the Posthuman Cyborg

Kusanagi and Batou's Discussion on the Boat – (29:00-33:02)[16]

This sequence, unlike the previous three, relies less on filmic strategy to convey meaning and more on the dialogue between Kusanagi and Batou. The Major, responding to an initial inquiry from Batou as to why she goes diving in her spare time, shares her feelings as she dives. Concerned about her line of thought, Batou asks if Kusanagi considers leaving Section 9, to which she begins a lengthy speech characterizing the nonhuman physicalities built into the cyborg bodies that both she and he reside within. Moving from physical feats of technological innovation towards the lack of possession for their memories and by extension identities, Kusanagi illustrates, at the very least, her thoughts at this moment in the film about her identity and personhood. As she concludes to this vocalization, Batou rhetorically questions her diving, implying a sense of insanity to the whole of it all, before a single line interjection from the Puppet Master. The Puppet Master is not in this scene, and the film implies that he hacked into both of their cyber brains to speak to them. As hopefully made apparent, the intent of analysis for this scene revolves around the speech Kusanagi makes, directly addressing some of the underlying ideas in *Ghost in the Shell* about personhood, identity, and the cyborg body beyond the human body.

[16] A transcription of the subtitles for this scene are located in Appendix A. While not entirely necessary, it is strongly encouraged that this dialogue is read prior to reading through this section. While not exactly brief, every word included in this moment from the film provides one of the central filmic examples for the manifestation of the "deeper" ideas underlying the film's foundation.

The rapid evolution of comments exchanged between Batou and Kusanagi crescendo into a revelation indicating the extent of internal conflict within the Major. After returning to the boat from diving, Batou asks Kusanagi what she feels when she goes down there, to which she replies, "I feel fear. Anxiety. Loneliness. Darkness. And perhaps…hope…As I float up towards the surface, I feel almost as though I could change into something else" (30:07-30:33). This initial response from the Major indicates deeper reasoning behind her diving, one linked with an apparent questioning of herself and her feelings as an extension of self-validation. Joseph Schaub, talking about this scene, in particular, states, "However, Kusanagi is not completely comfortable in her cyborg identity and she does not totally fit Haraway's paradigm of self-satisfied autonomy. The real 'action' of the film is not so much the hunt for evil perpetrators or even the Puppet Master but is rather a quest for her spiritual identity".[17] Kusanagi, the state-of-the-art military cyborg, feels emotion not all too different from the average human. Further, for Kusanagi to "feel almost as though [she] could change into something else" shows that she takes some issue with her cyborg body. Are the feelings of fear, anxiety, loneliness, darkness, and hope from diving, or could they possibly stem from how she feels about herself? It does not take long for the film to expand even further these moments into more exposition.

Kusanagi's juxtapositions between human and cyborg components of herself establish dualisms for reflection by the characters and the audience regarding the weight of such separations. After a moment to process her remark, Batou asks if the Major if she wants to quit Section 9. After remarking about a seemingly unrelated thing at first, Batou accusatively asks

[17] Joesph Christopher Schaub, "Kusanagi's Body: Gender and Technology in Mecha-anime," in *Asian Journal of Communications*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2001, 107.

her if she is drunk. For the next couple of minutes, except one line from Batou, the Major provides a succinct summation of the ideas discussed through this chapter up to this point. She talks about how, at a mere thought, her body could metabolize the alcohol in her blood within ten seconds. She adds that her metabolic control, enhanced sensory perception, improved reflexes, improved muscle capacity, and vastly increased data processing speed and muscle capacity all exist thanks to the cyber brain and cyborg body she now resides within. This series of detailed images juxtapose the human and nonhuman qualities that bound the struggle between the two in a cyberized existence. A simple example from this is how she can drink alcohol the same as any other human, but to be able to metabolize it from her bloodstream in ten seconds extends well beyond the limits of the unaugmented human body. The next major point she brings up surrounds the reasoning that she nor Batou could leave Section 9, even if they so desired. Kusanagi says, "We do have the right to resign if we choose. Provided we give the government back our cyborg shells and the memories they hold. Just as there are many parts needed to make a human a human, there's a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are." It is in this moment that the audience, if not already imagined, comes to terms with the nature of her predicament. As spoken by the Puppet Master later in the film and subject to the epigraph of this chapter, humanity prides itself on individualization determined by the memories one holds separating themselves from others. However, memory cannot be defined or at least understood in full, and without memories, what can mark the differences between one from another? This scene, in what is most likely best conducted in the manner it is, does not provide answers or solutions to the issue presented by Kusanagi. There is no one or definite answer, which allows the viewer to reflect on this work and reach their conclusions.

Ghost in the Shell and Its Importance to Cyberpunk

Compared to the likes of *Neuromancer* and *Blade Runner*, *Ghost in the Shell* appears more immediately thought-provoking, or possibly it just presents the thought-provoking questions closer to the forefront than the other works. The human condition and identity stand as central concepts present in cyberpunk. What does it mean to be human? What defines our 'humanness'? What does it mean to be human when compared to human-like or "more-human-than-human" cyborgs and the like? What is the relationship between humanity and technology? The film presents numerous scenes with the Major as she vocalizes her inner debates around her identity and humanness, which serve as direct displays to the audience over these concepts. What one may call a fascinating aspect of *Ghost in the Shell*, in terms of it as a multimedia franchise, is that no single answer or solution appears for the audience. Each entry to the franchise approaches the core narrative elements of the characters, location, and generic tropes from a different vantage, leading to different stories that allow freedom of interpretation on the part of the viewer.

Cyberpunk can manifest in many ways, honing in on macro- and micronarratives revolving around multinational criminal activities, the search of cyborg figures for more life or meaning for life, cowboy hackers, and their need for the digital high that they call cyberspace, and more. *Ghost in Shell* stands as one of the central texts to have come out of the first couple of decades within the Cyberpunk Movement, as well as one of the chief bridging works between western and eastern creators. Again, from Joseph Schaub's essay, he states the following:

> If we regard the Utopian and dystopian futures as equally possible, it is clear that what cyberpunk and mecha-anime narratives achieve is a presentation of

> both possibilities in a battle for preeminence. They provide visual representations of the struggle to find humanistic values in a landscape dominated by high-tech corporate power and mechanized military might.[18]

The more foundational background in Chapter 1, the close reading of *Blade Runner* in Chapter 2, and, now, a close reading of *Ghost in the Shell* here in Chapter 3, all contextualize small microcosms of the larger narrative that is cyberpunk as a genre. Shaub's remark here serves as a conclusion to this final section involving the historical and textual readings of the genre and central works within, as well as a transition to a more discursive conclusion to this work. This conclusion provides a final establishment of cyberpunk in the twentieth century, allowing for a forward application of these tropes and ideas to the twenty-first century. While not entirely the dystopic or post-dystopic worlds of *Neuromancer*, *Blade Runner*, and *Ghost in the Shell*, the world of the twenty-first century checks off many of the now near-prophetic components found through twentieth-century cyberpunk.

[18] Joesph Christopher Schaub, "Kusanagi's Body: Gender and Technology in Mecha-anime," in *Asian Journal of Communications*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2001, 87.

Conclusion

A "Boring Dystopia"

Rather than conclude this research with one final epigraph, it may serve a higher purpose, to begin with, the title of the section, A "Boring Dystopia." Cultural theorist Mark Fisher used the term as the name of a Facebook group that he started, and there is a Reddit page, r/ABoringDystopia, that uses the name as well. The expansive, pervasiveness of Facebook and the hivemind forum that is Reddit already both exist in thanks to the kind of imagined uses of early internet pioneers and the cyberpunks that dreamt of these very digital spaces. Nevertheless, it is in these platforms where a circuitous conclusion returns to for final commentary. Many of the cyberpunk worlds discussed so far fit the bill of a dystopic, near-dystopic, or post-dystopic world. Following the success of the cyberpunk movement in the 1990s, particularly with the success of *The Matrix* video games such as Ion Storm's *Deus Ex*, popular culture and daily life began to adopt small features from cyberpunk works and worlds. The internet's success in the 1990s led to complete saturation within the decade, and by the beginning of the new millennium, digital marketplaces and electronic mail became normalized. This shift shows a rapid change from cyberpunk's almost prophetic version of fictional worlds to the real world where people experienced things they could have only dreamed of two decades prior. However, the question remains of why "A 'Boring Dystopia'" for the conclusion. Between the turn of the millennium and the end of the 2010s, the lines between cyberpunk and reality blurred in ways that no one expected.

The dystopic worlds of cyberpunk did not manifest as imagined, but more than a fair share of these worlds does fit some of the images found across the globe today. Before any commentary on this precise note, let us review some of the major themes found from Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* and Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell*.

In the analysis of *Blade Runner*, three central tenets of cyberpunk appeared: the "othering" of the environment, the "othering" of people, and the question of humanness and selfhood, particularly in the vein of replicants as mirrored human forms. The cityscape, with the cloud reaching structures, a dark, grimy underbelly, and unwarranted invasion of advertising and top-down corporate bombardment on the average person, represented a distantly recognizable perversion of the world in the 1980s. The Los Angeles of the film did not feel like the Los Angeles of the 1980s, though commonality appears in the parallels between vast urban cityscapes and some of *Blade Runner*'s world. People, themselves, exist as blurred melting pots, representative of a world that progressed beyond barriers and borders. The cityspeak spoken on the streets of the film shows that, while English remains as the lingua franca, different languages and their subsequent cultures morph in the city's underbelly. People also seem more separate and isolated, with the extremes of the "dog-eat-dog" mentally of Western capitalism shown in a complete breakdown of society and structure for most of the people stuck living on Earth and the lower levels of the city. Finally, Roy Batty, Rachel, and the rest of the replicants in the film represent this conflict between their near-humanness (though they are almost more human than human) and the human masters that treat them as subhuman at best. The audience can weigh the dilemmas of

the film themselves and reflect on these themes with "some" separation from real-world parallels.

In the analysis of *Ghost in the Shell*, the final point from *Blade Runner* took center stage with two major themes: the exploration of identity and personhood through the corporeal and the exploration of identity and personhood through the cyborg mind. Major Kusanagi serves the role of a vessel for the exploration of the two main themes, with her cyborg body showing the connections to the human as well as the drastic separation from the human, as well as her internal conflict surrounding her interpretation of selfhood as she exists within her cyborg state. Her body, created to reflect the female body, incorporates several dualities. She looks human but can perform tasks beyond any human capability. She possesses excellent strength but appears vulnerable at times, at least by human standards. The matter of gaze and objectification also appears with her body being presented several times in the nude, though the film does not treat her as a piece of meat or purely for lustful male consumption. Beyond the physical, her mind stands as one of the few remnants of her humanity, and even that is fallible and beyond her complete ownership. If she loses her memories or can no longer exist as she does, what becomes of her? Is she still herself? Maybe or maybe not. The multitude of franchise entries for *Ghost in the Shell* allows for continued exploration of these ideas.

Now, how do these themes tie to the twenty-first-century reality touted at the beginning of this work? How does this tie to the title of this section? Globalization, the internet, and the rapid developments in technology have allowed the present day to become a "cyberpunk-esque" reality. Case, in *Neuromancer*, and Kusanagi, in *Ghost*

in the Shell, surf cyberspace and the internet through a mental interpretation of the physical interfacing that creates a virtual with a physicality. The internet of the real world lacks this interfacing and science fiction imagining. However, the advent of smartphones brought internet access across the globe, all at the fingertips of billions of people. Corporate power increases, not too different than that of cyberpunk counterparts, stands as another pertinent example. Facebook, Disney, Amazon, and Google all represent almost unimaginable swaths of their respective markets, with the average person, almost enslaved or enraptured by them to some capacity. The separation of humans and the decrease of physical interaction, in light of technology and the internet, create a world where everyone who directly participates is "othered" and sees "others" as opposed to the familiar social connectivity seen through time from early humans to the last several decades. Minorities face continued opposition from majorities, and minorities in this context apply across the board. Racial minorities, those who do not fall into the percent who see their wealth ever-increasing to astronomical numbers, socio-economic minorities who lack access to technology and knowledge of their more privileged counterparts, and more all face an overwhelming and ever-expanding barrier between them and success. Even ideas of self and personhood no longer are as clear cut as they once were before the internet, not they were ever clear cut from the beginning. Digital existence brings to discussion digital identity, false presentation of identity, recrafting of self-image and presentation, online dating, and social media. The extent of digital existence continues to expand beyond any grounding that could make simple the complexity of human-digital connection.

The world of the twenty-first century is almost a “boring dystopia” when compared to the likes of cyberpunk works.

Following the peak of cyberpunk, many derivatives appeared and continue to appear, including but not limited to biopunk, nanopunk, postcyberpunk, steampunk, dieselpunk, clockpunk, atompunk, steelpunk, stonepunk, raypunk, and solarpunk. Debates continue to occur over some of these subgenre’s validity. However, the point stands that science fiction and speculative fiction transcended itself as the twentieth century came to a close, becoming as prolific and diverse as the worlds that writers have forged for centuries. Genre and nostalgia themselves tie in part to cyberpunk. Cyberpunk is, for better or worse, tethered to the 1980s and the iconography of the 1980s. Recent music subgenres, including vaporwave and synthwave from the 2000s and 2010s, exhibit a nostalgic idolization of this period and, with it, a connection to this cyberpunk image that exists now looking back. Popular culture at the end of the 2010s, more broadly, seems to be experiencing some revitalization of the cyberpunk image and genre. Continued entries into the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise show a continued relevance and interest in part of the niche audiences consuming these works. *Altered Carbon*, the first in the Takeshi Kovacs series from Richard Morgan, received a Netflix adaptation in 2018. R. Talsorian Games and CD Projekt Red collaborated in taking the *Cyberpunk* franchise of Mike Pondsmith into the realm of video games for the 2020 release of *Cyberpunk 2077*. Cyberpunk continues to inspire and provide an escape for people after nearly forty years of existence.

This research, having taken a better part of three years as it evolved from coursework into a thesis and weathered a transition from two institutions, is not

conclusive, nor is it as expansive as it could be in exploring the nuances and expanse of cyberpunk. My future research into cyberpunk will explore more texts in more depth, as to better grasp the evolution of the genre and what the works reflected of the time and individuals that created them. Beyond the limits of strictly cyberpunk works, further research could connect to a more technological popular culture that continues to develop since the latter half of the twentieth century. The possibilities to expand on this research will continue to drive me as I live in close connection to both the science fiction works of the genre and the reality that surrounds me from day-to-day.

The world is not as bad as some of the cyberpunk worlds that weigh heavily on their antihero protagonists. The use of a "boring dystopia" does not fully capture the duality to the near-cyberpunk world of today. Dystopic elements exist, but so do antithetical less dystopic elements. Technology is a double-edged sword. The internet provides as many boons as it does banes. Continued exploration of these ideas presented in speculative fiction and popular culture works may shed light on the human perception of our reality and our direction. This research intends to provide another voice and another perspective on this philosophy so that someone may find something to take away and share with another.

Appendix A: Script for "*Kusanagi and Batou's Discussion on the Boat – (29:00-33:02)*"

[29:07-29:28]

Batou: A cyborg who goes diving in her spare time. That can't be a good sign. When did you start doing this? Doesn't the ocean scare you? If the floaters stopped working...

Kusanagi: Then I'd probably die. Or would you dive in after me?

[30:07-30:33]

Batou: So, what's it feel like when you go diving?

Kusanagi: Didn't you go through underwater training?

Batou: *I'm not talking about doing it in a damned pool.*

Kusanagi: I feel fear. Anxiety. Loneliness. Darkness. And perhaps, even…hope.

Batou: Hope? In the darkness of the sea?

Kusanagi: As I float up towards the surface, I almost feel as though I could change into something else.

[30:39-32:14]

Batou: As though you want to quit Section 9?

Kusanagi: Batou, how much of your original body do you have left?

Batou: Are you drunk?

Kusanagi: Convenient, isn't it? With the merest thought, the chemical plants inside our bodies could metabolize all the alcohol in our blood in about ten seconds, allowing us to sit here

drinking while on standby. If a technological feat is possible, man will do it. Almost as though it's wired into the core of our being. Metabolic control. Enhanced sensory perception. Improved reflexes and muscle capacity. Vastly increased data processing speed and capacity. All improvements thanks to our cyber brains and cyborg bodies. So what if we can't live without high-level maintenance? We have nothing to complain about.

Batou: It doesn't mean we've sold our souls to Section 9.

Kusanagi: We do have the right to resign if we choose. Provided we give the government back our cyborg shells and the memories they hold. Just as there are many parts needed to make a human a human, there's a remarkable number of things needed to make an individual what they are. A face to distinguish yourself from others. A voice you aren't aware of yourself. The hand you see when you awaken. The memories of childhood, the feelings for the future. That's not all. There's the expanse of the data net my cyber brain can access. All of that goes into making me what I am. Giving rise to a consciousness that I call 'me.' And simultaneously confining 'me' within set limits.

[32:20-32:42]

Batou: Is that why you dive into the sea with a body that only sinks?! What is it you see in the water's darkness?

'**The Puppet Master** (Offscreen, but in Batou and Kusanagi's minds)**:** For now we see through a glass, darkly.

Batou: That was you, wasn't it?

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